

Frequently Asked Questions About MEAP and MI -Access Fall 2005 Assessment Results

Questions related to MEAP

- 1) *Since the assessments were taken in Fall 2005 at the beginning of this school year, what was the content tested?***

Tests taken in Fall 2005 covered content taught in the previous year for mathematics and English language arts (reading and writing). Mathematics and English language arts assessments are administered in each grade from Grade 3 to Grade 8. Science and social studies assessments are only administered once at the end of elementary school and once at the end of middle school. Fall 2005 assessments for science and social studies covered content from the previous 2-3 years.

- 2) *Why were the MEAP assessments given in fall instead of winter or spring?***

MEAP assessments were given in fall for several reasons. Fall testing allows assessment of the full previous year of instruction and measures student learning that was retained over the summer break. Fall MEAP administration ends early in the school year and encourages teachers to proceed quickly into teaching the current year curriculum.

- 3) *Can 2005-06 scores be compared to 2004-05 scores for the same grade and subject?***

The Fall 2005 assessments are based on new content standards for both English language arts and Mathematics, and the assessment period was moved from winter to fall. Due to these changes in the assessment design, 2005-06 scores cannot be compared to previous year scores for the same grade and subject.

Though the content tested for science and social studies did not change, the performance standards for these two subjects were reconsidered since 5th and 8th grade students were taking the science test earlier and 6th and 9th grade students were taking the social studies test later. The different times at which the students took the test during their K-12 tenure changed the cut scores for determination of student performance (i.e., exceeded, met, basic, and apprentice). As such, the performance scales are not the same for comparison between the Winter 2005 and the Fall 2005 science or social studies tests.

These changes make it inappropriate to compare the results from Fall 2005 to the results from Winter 2005.

- 4) *Can 2005-06 scores be compared to 2004-05 scores for the next grade (e.g., Winter Grade 4 and Fall Grade 5) in the same subject?***

No. In the past, the same scale was used at each grade assessed (e.g., a score of 530 indicated "met standards"). Now, each grade has its own scale. Third grade scores cannot be validly compared with fourth grade scores, etc.

5) Can the scores of fourth graders assessed in winter be compared to the scores of the same students assessed in the fall to determine how much academic growth took place?

No. The assessments changed significantly as did the content standards on which they are based. Both of these changes make it impossible to estimate growth based on the Winter 2005 and Fall 2005 scores.

6) Can we compare the scores that Grade 5 (or Grade 8) students received in social studies in Fall 2005 with the scores those same students received as Grade 6 (or Grade 9) students in Winter 2005?

No. Standards were set on the social studies assessment several years ago and were set again for Fall of 2005. Standard setting is an activity that involves obtaining the professional judgment of many educators and other stakeholders. Several years ago a standard setting committee (including social studies experts, school administrators, business community representatives and parents) was asked to determine what score points on the social studies achievement scale separate students in the various performance levels (e.g., What score point separates students performing at the *Basic* level from students who *Met Standards*?). The group that met several years ago came to a shared conclusion that the standards for social studies in Michigan should be difficult relative to the Michigan standards for reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

Educators and other stakeholders since that time became concerned with the recommendation made by the standard setting committee several years ago. This issue was taken to additional committees and the State Board of Education. The committees and the State Board recommended that the social studies standards be revisited in order to set new social studies performance standards that clearly reflect realistic expectations for students in each performance level. Therefore, updated standards were established on the social studies assessment based upon the new standard setting panel of similar stakeholders.

7) How are the reading and writing scores combined into a score for English language arts (ELA)? Has this rule changed? Did this rule change have an impact?

Reading and writing scores are now combined into an ELA score by taking 2/3 of each student's reading score and adding it to 1/3 of the writing score.

In the past, reading and writing scores were combined into a total ELA score by taking the average of the reading and writing scores and applying an additional step: in order to meet standards in ELA as a whole, each student had to achieve at the *Basic* level or above in both reading and writing. This is called a *conjunctive* model.

There were two problems with the conjunctive approach:

- a. Because the writing assessment is much shorter than the reading assessment, it is also less reliable. A more reliable assessment is better able to distinguish among students at the various performance levels. An unweighted average of the two scores counts the less reliable assessment just as much as the more reliable assessment. This increases the chance of falsely identifying a student as not meeting Michigan standards (or the chance of false negatives).

- b. The conjunctive model described above also increases the chance of false negatives because a false negative in *either* reading *or* writing may result in a false negative in ELA.

In order to reduce the complexity of the system, the method of combining reading and writing scores was changed to eliminate the conjunctive model and to weigh the more reliable of the assessments (reading) more heavily.

This change to the calculation of total ELA scores was reviewed by Michigan's Technical Advisory Committee (a committee of nationally respected psychometricians and measurement experts) and was approved unanimously.

8) *Where are the 9th grade social studies scores?*

The 9th grade social studies assessment was administered at the same time as the high school retest in the fall of 2005, slightly later than the tests for Grades 3 to 8. Results will be returned with those of the fall high school retest and will reflect student social studies knowledge and skills acquired in the middle school grades.

9) *Can these scores be used to get a preview of the school's status in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?*

No. The process for determining the AYP status for a school or district is very complex, involving data from many sources. The following are several reasons why the publicly reported MEAP data cannot be used to get a preview of the school's AYP status for 2005-06:

- Michigan is awaiting federal approval of requested amendments to the Accountability Workbook, which will govern the details of AYP determination for 2005-06;
- MI-Access data have not yet been combined with MEAP data;
- Feeder reports, used to attribute AYP data to the school where instruction occurred in 2004-05, will not be finalized until late March.

An AYP appeal period is scheduled for April of 2006, with public release of Report Cards for elementary and middle schools to occur in June.

10) *My school's fourth graders learned the content assessed in October 2005 at the K-3 school that they attended in 2004-05. How will this be reflected making decisions based on the 2005-06 data?*

Because the fall assessments were based on content taught in the prior grade level in 2004-05, feeder school reports will be used to attribute student performance for AYP to the school where instruction occurred in 2004-05.

11) *Some of the students assessed at our school were not enrolled at the school during 2004-05. Their scores do not reflect learning that occurred at our school. Why are these scores included in the public release?*

The public MEAP results report on the performance of all students who were assessed at the building. MEAP has a thirty-year history of including all students in the public reports. However, the scores of students enrolled less than a full academic year prior to testing will

be excluded from the data used to determine if the school meets Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

12) *Do these scores reflect the Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) in English language arts and mathematics?*

Yes. The scores are based on new assessments which were built specifically to measure the new content standards (the GLCEs).

13) *How can students with disabilities be held to the same standards as other students?*

If students with disabilities took the MEAP, they are indeed held to the same standards as all other students. However, if students with disabilities took MI-Access (Michigan's alternate assessments for students with cognitive disabilities), those students are held to alternate content standards that reflect the cognitive levels of those students. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans are developed for each student with disabilities by stakeholders in that student's education (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, etc.). Those teams of stakeholders have the responsibility of determining which assessment is the most appropriate for each student with disabilities and, therefore, the standards to which they should be held.

14) *Where can I find information about how to read and understand MEAP results?*

Visit the MEAP website at www.michigan.gov/meap and click on the Meap Test Results button on the left side of the page. For further assistance in locating information, call the MEAP help line at 1-877-560-TEST or send an email to: MEAP@michigan.gov.

15) *Did schools have an opportunity to see test results and make corrections prior to the public release?*

Schools had an opportunity to review their demographics data and tested students rosters used for the Fall 2005 MEAP tests. The demographics include data such as gender, ethnicity, and other general student descriptors.

Schools also had an opportunity during that time to crosscheck their roster of students who took the test with the number of tests scored for that school. Schools also were given access to their test results, through a secure website, for at least three days prior to the public release of the scores.

16) *What do the performance levels mean?*

The MEAP tests measure what students know and can do in relation to the state curriculum standards.

All MEAP tests have four performance levels.

Level 1 – indicates that a student has “Exceeded Michigan Standards”

Level 2 – indicates that a student has “Met Michigan Standards”

Level 3 – indicates that a student has demonstrated “Basic” knowledge and skills of Michigan Standards

Level 4 – indicates that a student is considered to be at an “Apprentice” level, showing little success in meeting Michigan standards

17) Who sets the standards for the MEAP tests?

Groups of educators, teachers, and school administrators with expertise in a subject and grade set the performance level standards for the MEAP tests. A skilled test expert guides this group through a nationally recognized process to set the standards.

18) Who scores MEAP tests?

Pearson Educational Measurement has been contracted to provide scoring services. Multiple-choice responses are machine scored and verified through a quality control process. Written responses are scored here in Michigan and in other locations facilities by teams of extensively trained scorers.

19) Who develops the tests?

Test development is a multi-stepped process involving thousands of Michigan school administrators, teachers, curriculum experts and students. Assessment Committees are convened from across the state with members chosen to represent the various educational professional organizations, local and intermediate school district educators.

Items are developed and reviewed by Bias Review Committees (BRC's) for fairness and to assure that no group is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. Educators and citizens representing the diverse demographics of the state are on these committees. Items are then reviewed by Content Advisory Committees (CAC's) comprised of classroom teachers and educators at the grade levels to be tested. All MEAP content is reviewed, primarily for two considerations: grade appropriateness and to ensure that items reflect Michigan curriculum standards. All items are field tested and reviewed a second time by the Bias and Content committees.

Test designs are developed involving content experts, teachers, school administrators and assessment experts. The content to be tested is identified from the state curriculum as well as the types and format of the items. Several items are identified to measure each component of the state curriculum. Items are different for each test cycle to limit teaching to the test, but they consistently measure the same components of the curriculum

20) When did Michigan begin MEAP testing and how has it evolved?

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) was initiated by the State Board of education, supported by the Governor and funded by the Michigan legislature through Public Act 307 of 1969 (Section 14). From 1969 until 1973, MEAP used norm-referenced tests from a commercial test publisher. Students' scores were ranked in comparison to each other, but gave no information in terms of meeting a specified standard. In 1973-74, Michigan educators began working with Michigan Department of Education (MDE) staff to develop specific performance objectives to serve as the basis for the first tests built to Michigan specifications.

Current MEAP tests are based on the Content Standards developed by Michigan educators and approved by the Michigan State Board of Education in 1995. MEAP tests are criterion-referenced, meaning that each student's results are judged and reported against a set

performance standard. If a student meets the standard, it means he/she meets expectations on the recommended state curriculum.

Educators from throughout Michigan continue to revise and update Michigan curriculum documents that serve as the basis for MEAP and in the development and ongoing improvement of these tests.

The Michigan Revised School Code and the State School Aid Act require the establishment of educational standards and the assessment of student academic achievement but there is no state-mandated curriculum. Accordingly, the State Board of Education, with the input of educators throughout Michigan, approved a system of academic standards and a framework within which local school districts could develop, implement, and align curricula as they see fit.

The MEAP tests have been recognized nationally as sound, reliable and valid measurements of academic achievement. Students who score high on these tests have demonstrated significant achievement in valued knowledge and skill. Further, the tests provide the only common denominator in the state to measure in the same way, at the same time, how all Michigan students are doing on the same skills and knowledge

Questions related to MI-Access

21) What is MI-Access (pronounced my-access)?

MI-Access, Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program, is one component of the State Board-approved Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS). The MEAS also includes the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) for English Language Learners. It is the state's only standardized assessment program designed specifically for students with disabilities whose Individualized Education Program Teams have determined that the MEAP is not appropriate for them, even with assessment accommodations.

22) Do all students with disabilities have to take MI-Access?

No. In fact, the majority of students with disabilities take the MEAP. There is, however, a small population of students for whom the MEAP, even with assessment accommodations, is not appropriate. In fall 2005, about 22 percent of students with disabilities in grades 3 through 8 participated in MI-Access.

23) How many assessments are in MI-Access?

At this time, MI-Access is comprised of three types of assessments: (1) MI-Access Participation, (2) MI-Access Supported Independence, and (3) MI-Access Functional Independence. The assessments are designed for students with varying cognitive functioning levels.

24) What students would likely take MI-Access Participation?

MI-Access Participation is designed for students who have, or function as if they have, **severe** cognitive impairment. These students are expected to require extensive, ongoing support in adulthood. They may also have considerable cognitive and physical impairments

that impact their ability to generalize or transfer learning, and thus make determining their abilities and skills difficult. For that reason, the Participation assessments focus on how a student responds to the opportunity to participate in an activity, rather than on how well he or she carries out that activity.

25) What students would likely take MI-Access Supported Independence?

MI-Access Supported Independence is designed for students who have, or function as if they have, ***moderate*** cognitive impairment. These students are expected to require some ongoing support in adulthood. They may also have both cognitive and physical impairments that impact their ability to generalize or transfer learning; however, they usually can follow learned routines and demonstrate independent living skills. The Supported Independence assessments, therefore, are designed to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Specifically, they measure how students perform certain tasks while acknowledging that they may require some allowable level of assistance to do so.

26) Are MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence paper and pencil assessments?

No. Given the student population taking part in these two assessments, they use an on-demand, structured format. Instead of a paper and pencil test, teachers observe students as they carry out a standard set of activities during the course of a normal school day. Then, teachers score students using a standardized scoring guide.

27) What students would likely take MI-Access Functional Independence?

MI-Access Functional Independence is designed for students who have, or function as if they have, ***mild*** cognitive impairment. This involves an exceptionally wide range of students. For example, many of these students are capable of meeting their own needs and living successfully in their communities without overt support from others. With some support, they also are able to assess their personal strengths and limitations and access resources, strategies, supports, and linkages that will help them maximize their potential effectiveness.

28) Do the MI-Access Functional Independence assessments also rely on teacher observation?

No. This student population's curriculum and instruction focuses more heavily on academics as reflected in Michigan's Model Content Standards. Therefore, the assessments are more similar to the MEAP than they are to MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence. The MI-Access Functional Independence assessments include the content areas of English language arts and mathematics, and students respond verbally or in writing to multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

29) What does the term "or function as if" mean? It is often used to describe students participating in the different MI-Access assessments.

That phrase refers to students who may, by diagnostic category, be identified as having a certain cognitive impairment, but who adaptively function within another level of impairment. These students are considered as "those who function as if they have such impairment," and, therefore, should be given the MI-Access assessment that best suits their adaptive functioning level of independence.

30) *Who decides which assessment a student will take?*

Using Michigan's guidelines for participation in state assessment, a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team decides whether he or she will take the MEAP, the MEAP with assessment accommodations, or MI-Access. If the team chooses MI-Access, it must then determine which of the three MI-Access assessments is most appropriate, based on the student's cognitive functioning level as well as his or her curriculum and instruction.

31) *Who is on a student's IEP Team?*

Each student in special education has an IEP Team. The team is typically made up of a district/school representative, a general education teacher, a special education teacher or related service provider, and the student's parents or guardians. Other people may also participate in IEP Team meetings—including additional teachers, additional related services providers, other school/district representatives, and the student. The IEP Team is responsible for making many decisions about a student and his or her education, such as his or her special education eligibility category and educational opportunities related to career, transition, and post-school experiences. In 1998, IEP Teams also became responsible for determining how their students should be assessed on statewide and districtwide assessments (IDEA 1997 and its 2004 reauthorization).

32) *When is MI-Access administered?*

Assessment administrators have about six weeks in which to administer MI-Access. Students in grades 3 through 8 are assessed in the fall of each school year and students in grade 11 are assessed in the spring of each school year.

33) *For MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence, students receive one overall assessment score based on their performance on five or six Performance Expectations (PEs). What are PEs?*

Performance Expectations can be considered "yardsticks" against which a student's performance can be measured. In MI-Access, they reflect what students who have cognitive impairment are expected to know and be able to do at certain grades.

34) *Are all students who participate in MI-Access Functional Independence assessed on both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics?*

No. Most students will take part in both the Functional Independence English language arts and mathematics assessments, however IEP Teams have the option of having students take MI-Access Functional Independence for one content area and the MEAP for another, depending on his or her strengths, curriculum, and instruction.

35) *How is MI-Access scored?*

Students can obtain three levels of achievement on MI-Access: (1) Surpassed the Performance Standard, (2) Attained the Performance Standard, or (3) Emerging Toward the Performance Standard. These achievement levels and students' scores are returned to districts, schools, classrooms, and parents in a variety of customized reports. The reports are accompanied by a handbook, which explains how the results can be used to inform instruction and curriculum.

36) *How are MI-Access results used?*

MI-Access results are used along with MEAP scores to calculate participation rates and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. They also are used, along with other information, to help (1) parents better understand their child's educational performance, (2) teachers review and improve programs and instruction, and (3) IEP Teams make informed decisions. Most important, if MI-Access results are used thoughtfully, they will enhance the ability of all students to benefit from the school experience and prepare for adult life roles.

37) *Where can I learn more about MI-Access?*

There are a number of resources that explain different aspects of the state's alternate assessment program. You can access those resources on the MI-Access Web page (www.mi.gov/mi-access) or at the MI-Access Information Center (www.mi-access.info).